

Garamendi urges leaders to help make college accessible to all

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Lt. Gov. John Garamendi on Wednesday called on California's political and business leaders to craft a strategic plan that would make college accessible for students across all socio-economic backgrounds.

The plan should include technical training at community colleges, which is essential to keeping the state's economic engine running, Garamendi said during a luncheon speech at the Sacramento Press Club downtown.

A trustee on the boards of the University of California and California State University systems, Garamendi blamed state politicking for higher student tuition fees year after year.

"In the last four years, the fees for the students at the university systems have gone up nearly 100 percent," Garamendi said. "That simply slams the door on lower-income students as well as our middle-income students. It cannot continue."

A veteran of Sacramento politics, Garamendi's name has been tossed around as a potential Democratic gubernatorial candidate in 2010. When asked whether he plans to run, he said it wasn't the right time to answer.

On protecting California's water resources, the former deputy secretary for the U.S. Department of the Interior under President Clinton said the state has "no choice but to do a lot";

However, Garamendi declined to take a position on whether the state should build more dams or construct a canal to channel water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to southern parts of the state.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has called a special legislative session to tackle the state's water crisis and proposed the use of bonds to build two new dams. The governor supports a canal so long as construction is paid for by users or another entity.